DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 628 JC 690 150

By-Hannah, William
The Leavers' View.
Project on Student Development in Small Colleges, Plainfield, Vt.
Pub Date [69]
Note-4p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, February 5-8, 1969).
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
Descriptors-*Dropout Characteristics, *Junior Colleges, *Student Attitudes

This study reports findings related to student attrition in 13 colleges. Several tests, such as The Omnibus Personality Inventory, were used to determine the personality characteristics of students who leave college prior to graduation. Included in the findings are: (1) peers and parents rank high in the help asked for and received, with the college personnel coming in a poor third; (2) college personnel appear to be contacted after decisions to withdraw have been solidified; (3) 20% of the dropouts had first considered withdrawal before registration day; and (4) most students did not find the college counseling system particularly valuable or effective in helping resolve dropout problems. (JC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

ED029628

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FRO
PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR O
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCA
POSITION OR POLICY.

The Leavers' View

William Hannah

Project on Student Development
Plainfield, Vermont

What have the rates of attrition been in our study over the first three years? Recalling Summerskill's review in 1962 where he indicates that Iffert's 1950 findings still stand in which over 50% of entering students across the nation withdraw from the college of first choice over four years, how did the Project compare? To date, we show a 42% attrition rate overall. When we exclude the non-CASC colleges in the Project we see a 48% rate of leaving. The range is 23% to 61% with the lowest withdrawal found at a highly selective non-CASC college and the highest rates at three colleges--one non-CASC college (60%), two CASC schools, one a conservative religious college (61%), and one a liberal experimental school (60%). Other's rates show one in the 36% bracket, 3 in the 40-42% range, 3 at 48%, and one at 55%.

What are the personality characteristics of the leavers from the thirteen colleges in our Project? The Omnibus Personality Inventory shows that at entrance these students when compared with stayers are more impulsive, more complex, more independent and less willing to create good impressions about themselves. The dropouts from conservative colleges in the study are less integrated personally, less altruistic, have greater anxiety, and are more religiously liberal. Those who leave the liberal, experimental colleges have greater anxiety, are more socially withdrawn, are highly artistic, less integrated personally and less practical.

Twenty percent of those who finally withdraw, first think about withdrawal before registration day. Final decisions about leaving occur mostly in January (10%) and June (48%) and seventy-seven percent make their final decisions when the college is not in session apparently after leaving the atmosphere of stress--final examinations, faculty pressure, deadlines, etc.

How they feel--about classes, courses, the college, themselves.

The college dropouts assessed from the data at our disposal generally see themselves through an unclear perspective. They appear, from their responses, as uncertain and ambivalent. No definite patterns of self-assurance come from their expressions of feelings as they moved through the withdrawal process. They are not particularly relieved to be putting their college experience behind them. They are not uncertain about their personal abilities, but neither are they confident about their future performance. Thus they leave the campus setting with mixed emotions. They are not optimistic about their future life and its pressures. However, they are neither disappointed in themselves or admit to anxiety--they are hopefully confident about their decision. What is important is that they express no disillusion with colleges in general.

JC 690 150

In evaluating the various aspects of the college program--academic atmosphere, college faculty, courses, group discussion, and religious atmosphere, a majority of potential leavers assessed the college climate

---

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the AERA (Los Angeles, February 5-8, 1969).

as fairly stimulating. This is surprising because one would assume the majority would be highly critical of the college and its program. Relatively few felt that the academic atmosphere was not stimulating--about one third was extremely stimulated by the academic climate and by the faculty. Only a few were not so impressed.

A large majority of potential leavers expressed their feeling that the courses were stimulating--about 15% went so far as to say that the courses were extremely stimulating.

Group discussions were extremely stimulating to a few of those reporting; over half suggested that they were fairly stimulated by the group dynamics in the colleges.

Taking into account that academic climate, faculty, courses, and group dynamics are looked on favorably by the leavers, and that they picture the campuses as relatively exciting places, it is odd that withdrawal is being considered. No doubt other reasons are factors in the decision to leave.

Of all the components of the college programs analyzed, the religious atmosphere was assessed by withdrawees as the least stimulating. Almost half of the potential leavers indicated the option of "not particularly stimulating" when asked to assess this part of the program. Only 16% were extremely impressed by the religious climate and courses. About one third was slightly stimulated and one half was not.

Potential sophomore leavers were also asked to evaluate activities, and faculty contacts outside the basic academic program. Most activities outside the program were valuable and supportive. Peer relationships, extra-curricular activities, cultural programs and faculty contacts outside of class were all reported as valuable by more than half of the sample in this part of our study.

Value of the college counseling systems was also assessed and, interestingly, many more than half of the total group responding felt that these systems were not particularly valuable or effective in helping resolve problems concerning withdrawal. In fact, all college personnel, including college counselors are not considered initially by those students who have personal problems relating to withdrawal. Peers and parents rank high in the help asked for and received, college personnel come in a poor third. It appears that when advice is desired, college people are contacted only in the later stages of the process--probably after decisions to withdraw have been solidified.

Who do they talk with, what do they talk about?

If the leavers from the thirteen Project colleges are typical of the withdrawees across the nation, they are mainly interested in the opinions of their peers and their parents.

In our study we tried to assess the frequency of contact with various people regarding the problems involved in withdrawal of freshmen. We found that discussion occurred first with friends of the same sex, father and mother came second, and a friend of the opposite sex was a close third.

Among sophomores, of all the contacts, most were made with parents and peers--a smaller percentage discussed problems with college personnel. Those who spoke to college people reported valuable and fairly effective results; however, it was apparent that relatively the leavers' felt that help came more from parents and peers than from college personnel.

The subjects which freshmen leavers discussed were varied. This diversity indicates the multiple forces which influence dropouts' decisions. Of twenty alternatives suggested on the Attrition Questionnaire, the following ten were indicated as the most important topics of discussion:

1. Educational plans and purposes
2. Plans concerning life in general
3. Educational opportunities elsewhere
4. Attitudes and values
5. Academic underachievement
6. College rules and regulations
7. Vocational plans
8. Limitations of the college
9. Financial problems
10. Religious beliefs

With whom were these topics discussed? Is the person the leaver contacts one who can give proper and pertinent advice? Can he help the leaver reach a sound decision? The leaver probably does not consider the answers to these questions, but seeks out the sympathetic ear and avoids those whom he finds it difficult to find or unpleasant to deal with. If this is true, it may follow that poor decisions about withdrawal are made because of poor prior choices for assistance.

In our study, for each topic of discussion, ten persons were offered as choices. With two exceptions, each of the top ten topics was discussed usually with friends or parents. The first exception, religious beliefs, was discussed principally with peers and seldom with parents. Pastors, college personnel and others entered here not at all. Strange? Financial problems was the other exception; this was discussed primarily with parents; but infrequently with others. Leavers seldom discussed religious beliefs, attitudes and values, plans concerning life in general, financial problems, or interestingly, limitations in college curriculum or extra-curricular activities with college personnel. They did discuss with them academic underachievement, educational and vocational plans, college rules and regulations, and educational opportunities elsewhere, but apparently late in the process and possibly only as a last resort.

The actions and responses of other persons, we are sure, are important to leavers because these responses at such a crucial time usually cause reactions. Leavers responded to each of nine alternatives when asked how others reacted to discussions about leaving. A majority of all persons

involved in these discussions urged the leaver to remain in college. However, of those who urged withdrawal: friends and parents predominated (38%), deans and administrators were mentioned frequently, counselors and faculty seldom spoke for withdrawal. Deans and administrators were more often reported as "mainly interested in the college welfare." Few of the other persons in the process felt that the leaver had failed in his endeavors; failure was conveyed more often by parents when it was reported. Where disinterest was indicated, it was more evident among college personnel. Help came predominently from parents and included consideration of advantages and disadvantages of leaving. Counselors and faculty helped but to a lesser degree than parents. Deans and administrators came last on the leavers' lists of helping persons.

Friends and parents were most often cited as "Warm and understanding"--college personnel less frequently. Greatest disappointment came from parents, with friends coming next and college personnel last.

The leavers do have help from friends, parents, and some college persons. It seems regretable that people outside the institutions were of greater benefit to the leaver than those inside who probably could offer much more sound advice.

This combination of findings suggests several things. As one researcher observed, it reflects the relationship between the student and the official college machinery.

Academic underachievement and conversations with counselors go together. Question!--Was discussion voluntary?

College rules and regulations and conversations with deans and administrators go together. Question!--Are the leavers concerned about personal freedom? It seems so!

Educational and vocational plans and educational opportunities elsewhere are discussed with deans and administrators. Question!--Is this merely the exit interview after decision has been made? Probably it is!

The limited role of counselors and faculty in these matters is consistent with their minimal participation in discussion of more personal matters--religious beliefs, attitudes and values, life plans. Relationships seem to be such that students who are leaving do not discuss bothersome limitations in the college program with college personnel.

If this is true at all CASC colleges, there are three consequences:
1. The colleges lose information useful to their own development.
2. The leaver misses opportunity to influence program modification.
3. The leaver loses the opportunity to clarify forces and purposes at work in his withdrawal.

Again, if this is true it is unfortunate, but our data points to the facts; college counselors and faculty enter the process late. Plans for leaving are well crystallized through discussions with parents and peers. Minimal interaction of college people apparently works to increase college attrition--at least this seems to be what our data are saying.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF. LOS ANGELES APR 19 1969 CLEARINGHOUSE JUNIOR COLLEGE INFORMATION